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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000757

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA TO RETURN AMBASSADORS TO EU COUNTRIES

REF: A) BELGRADE 185, B) BELGRADE 684, C) BELGRADE 695

Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) Despite our multiple warnings that such a move would be ill-advised and counterproductive, the Serbian Government voted "unanimously" on July 24 to send their ambassadors back only to European Union countries that had recognized Kosovo. Some ministers reportedly opposed the partial return but were unable to overcome Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic's determination to implement his idea. Our contacts claim Serbia will return the remaining ambassadors, including the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan anywhere from one to five months from now, although most predict the timing will be linked to the UN General Assembly and Serbia's effort to refer the Kosovo question to the International Court of Justice.  
End Summary.

"Unanimous" Government Decision  
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¶2. (U) On July 24, the Serbian government approved a proposal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to return ambassadors to European Union countries from which they were withdrawn in response to recognition of Kosovo's independence (Ref A). Minister of Environment and Space Planning Oliver Dulic, tasked with announcing the results of the government session, said that the government had decided unanimously to alter the Kosovo Action Plan in the interest of furthering European integration. He added that ambassadors would not be returned to non-EU countries before the UN General Assembly session, where Serbia will seek the referral of Kosovo's declaration of independence to the International Court of Justice.

¶3. (U) The move will result in the return of Serbian ambassadors to Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Germany, Slovenia, and Sweden. According to press reports, new ambassadors will also be sent to the UK (Dejan Popovic) and Belgium (Radomir Diklic), posts that were unoccupied at the time of recognition. Ambassadors will not yet be returned to the United States, Australia, Croatia, Japan, Canada, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, or Turkey.

¶4. (SBU) MFA Political Director Borislav Stefanovic confirmed to us on July 22 that the return of ambassadors to EU countries would also result in the lifting of all Action Plan-related restrictions on contacts by EU countries with the GOS in Belgrade. When asked why the new government did not do away with the previous government's contact policy, Stefanovic claimed the Action Plan was drafted jointly by the DS and DSS and that President Tadic fully supported it. We reminded Stefanovic that the Action Plan had been former PM Kostunica's brain-child and that DS representatives, including FM Jeremic, had claimed never to have seen the plan.

No One Willing to Stand up to Jeremic/Tadic  
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15. (SBU) Post engaged a wide range of government and party contacts to discourage such a move by the Serbian government. G-17 Plus leader Mladjan Dinkic, Democratic Party official Dragan Djilas (Ref B), and even Socialist Party leader Ivica Dacic (Ref C) all agreed with our assessment that a decision to return ambassadors only to EU countries would be counterproductive. G-17 Plus whip Suzana Grubjesic told us on July 24 that none of DS's coalition partners supported the move, adding that the coalition "should act like it had won the elections" and scrap the Action Plan. The daily "Blic" later quoted G-17 Plus as favoring the return of all ambassadors simultaneously.

16. (SBU) In a meeting immediately after the government decision, Minister of Telecommunications Jasna Matic (G-17 Plus) described the move as "unfortunate." She said that some ministers had expressed opposition during the government meeting, but the junior coalition partners had been unable to overcome the DS's "personality driven" (read: FM Jeremic) initiative. Deputy Prime Minister Dinkic, who is not shy about expressing his opinion, was on vacation and did not participate in the meeting. (Although those opposed to the partial return of ambassadors could in theory have pressed for a vote in hopes of splitting the DS ministers, such a move would be unusual; almost all issues are decided by consensus rather than by vote during government meetings.)

17. (SBU) Serbian Ambassador to the United States Ivan Vujacic told us on July 24 that he had advocated an "all or nothing" approach to Jeremic, but that he had been rejected. "What can we do," Vujacic said, "Tadic is President."

Next Steps?

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18. (SBU) Predictions on the return of the remaining ambassadors vary. Vujacic said that he did not expect to return to Washington for several months. The British ambassador was told by a member of President Tadic's inner circle, however, that relations with non-EU countries would be normalized just before or after the UNGA, i.e. in just over a month. The most pessimistic prediction came from Defense Ministry State Secretary Dusan Spasojevic (DS), who warned us that the government might not restore high-level contacts with the United States until after U.S. presidential elections.

Comment

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19. (SBU) Although Jeremic believes that he is mitigating criticism from the opposition by continuing to block high-level relations with the United States, he is mistaken. The move simply ensures that the government will have to face the criticism twice. Jeremic also believes that the action will drive a wedge between the United States and Europe on the ICJ referral issue, an outcome we will seek to avoid by continuing to engage with our European counterparts in Belgrade. The most tangible result of the government's unanimous decision will probably be diminished leeway for ministers to ignore the contact policy and meet with us. They may assume that they will still be able to do business with us through "unofficial" channels; post intends to minimize these contacts for the time being in order to underscore the costs to Serbia's national interests of this decision. End comment.

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